

Country of origin - where is food really from?

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According to a study undertaken by the BEUC (the European Consumer Organisation), the majority of consumers believe origin labelling should be mandatory for most foods. In fact, almost 70% (on average) of consumers in Austria, France, Poland and Sweden consider the origin to be an important factor when selecting food. This may be because they relate the origin of the food to its safety and quality or due to concern about the environmental impact of food miles.

While this desire may have been accelerated by food industry scandals and public concern about food miles, the trend is no longer just a consumer thirst for information. Country of origin labelling is a requirement for certain foods.

Meaning of country of origin?

There is no statutory definition of 'place of origin or provenance' in the Food Labelling Regulations 1996 or of 'origin or provenance' in Directive 2000/13/EC. But in both Codex⁵ and the World Trade Organisation Rules, the country of origin is deemed to be the place of last substantial change. This is consistent with section 36 of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 where the approach is that for the purposes of the Act: 'goods shall be deemed to have been manufactured or produced in the country in which they last underwent a treatment or process resulting in a substantial change'.

There is a responsibility for food businesses to avoid misleading origin labelling, however, it seems that many consumers are confused by what it actually means with the majority unsure whether origin label refers to the country from which the animal or vegetable was farmed or where it underwent further processing. The BEUC research also showed that most consumers would like to know both the country where the product was farmed and also the one where it was subsequently processed.

By mapping your entire food supply chain using a comprehensive farm to fork system such as Authenticate IS, you will be able to see all of the countries involved in your supply chain on a map and by country flags. This can be useful if you need to comply with COOL legislation or identify potential risks of modern slavery in your supply chain.

With France having been given the go ahead from the European Commission to trial mandatory COOL for processed meat and dairy products, Italy, Greece, Finland, Lithuania and Portugal have requested similar labelling. It looks like country of origin will soon be a requisite for food businesses.

For more information on how to join the Authenticate IS platform or maximise your membership and safeguard your food business, call us on 01423 548 583 or email enquiries@authenticateis.com